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Maryland Department of Planning

Martin O'Malley
Governor
Anthony G. Brown
Lt. Governor

Richard Eberhart Hall
Secretary
Matthew J. Power
Deputy Secretary

August 23, 2007

Honorable Craig A Moe
Mayor
City of Laurel
8103 Sandy Springs Road
Laurel, Maryland 20707

Dear Mayor Moe:

The Maryland Department of Planning has completed a coordinated review of the *City of Laurel Master Plan Comprehensive Amendment*. The State of Maryland is committed to fighting the high financial, social, and environmental costs of sprawl development through effective Smart Growth and Neighborhood Conservation strategies.

The Plan does an excellent job of laying out overall goals and objectives for future growth in Laurel, including a thorough discussion of the Eight Visions constituting the State's Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Policy as they pertain to the City. The City has done a commendable job in creating a plan that recognizes its unique nature and recommends types of growth that are consistent with that character. In this regard, we are encouraged to see objectives and recommendations that will encourage infill development and revitalization in older retail centers throughout the City. It is apparent that Laurel has given this issue a great deal of thought and has incorporated sufficient flexibility in the Plan to facilitate a wide variety of infill development and redevelopment. Growth that is sensitive to the City's existing character is essential in maintaining a steady economy and protecting the City's residential neighborhoods.

The transportation element thoroughly addresses the need for multi-modal transportation services and the appropriate arrangement of land uses, particularly the provision of mixed use TOD near the MARC station and along the main street corridor.


However, as submitted this plan does not yet meet the requirements for completing the Municipal Growth Element or the Water Resources Element. It should be amended prior to October 1, 2009 to fully meet the requirements of HB 1141. In order to meet these requirements, the Municipal Growth Element must include population projections, a development capacity analysis and impact analysis on sensitive areas. The Water Resources Element must include a discussion of existing raw water sources, reservoir capacity, operational delivery specifics, current and projected water demand relative to supply and the size of the population being served. Similarly, the waste water section needs attention paid to management and operation, identification of discharge locations, TMDLs, point source caps, current and future nitrogen, phosphorus loading and other contaminants, and an estimate of existing and future non-point source pollutant loading. Our comments elaborate on the things the plan must include to meet these requirements.

We look forward to further revisions of this Plan to fully address the new Water Resources, Municipal Growth, and Sensitive Areas requirements of HB 1141. To assist you, we are enclosing Models and Guidelines #25: *Writing the Municipal Growth Element to the Comprehensive Plan*, and #26: *The Water Resources Element: Planning for Water Supply and Wastewater and Stormwater Management*.

The following pages contain comments and recommendations from the Maryland Department of Planning. Also, included are reviews by the Maryland Historical Trust and the Maryland Department of Transportation, State Highway Administration.

Thank you again for the opportunity to review this document. If you have any questions and/or require assistance, please contact review coordinator Steven Allan at 410-767-4572, or the Metro Unit Manager Mike Nortrup at 410-767-4556.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephanie Martins".

Stephanie Martins, AICP
Director, Land Use Planning and Analysis

cc: Steve Allan, MDP
Karl Brendle, Director of Community Planning

August 23, 2007

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING COMMENTS

City of Laurel Master Plan Comprehensive Amendment

The Maryland Department of Planning has reviewed the City of Laurel's Draft Master Plan and offers a number of comments to consider as the plan moves toward final adoption.

SUMMARY

Overall, the plan does an excellent job of addressing the City's goals and objectives for future growth. The plan recognizes Laurel's strategic location in the Baltimore-Washington region, and the tremendous potential to guide well-planned new growth in an orderly, balanced fashion utilizing sound planning principles.

It is noted that the discussion of the Eight Visions of the 1992 Planning Act (as amended) is particularly well presented as it pertains to the particularity of Laurel's planning context.

The transportation element thoroughly addresses multi-modal transportation issues of the City through its transportation goals, objectives and recommended actions. In the land use element, the plan discusses the provision of mixed use TODs near the MARC station and along the main street corridor, revitalizing strip developments along major streets, managing access onto arterials, and other land use and transportation planning integration strategies. Such transportation and land use goals and objectives are consistent with the State's Smart Growth policies.

Similarly, the historic preservation goals and objectives are good, but could be strengthened by adding a discussion about the role of preservation in economic growth and revitalization, in addition to its importance in preserving the City's heritage.

The establishment of revitalization areas is an outstanding idea, and it appears that a lot of flexibility for redevelopment in a number of zones is provided. However, projects "are not permitted by right, but reflect a negotiated development agreement that is unique to a specific proposal, or development that reflects the applicant's ability to achieve the goals and objectives of this alternative form of development" (page 65).

The City might consider a more citizen-based approach where citizens, property owners, and officials work together to create a pattern book, design guideline or form-based code to clarify what kind of infill and new development is desired and how it could best be designed to function according to Smart Growth principles. For the biggest projects, the community input process that worked so well for the successful Laurel Mall redevelopment project should be emulated.

Population is growing at increasing rate, according to the Chart on p. 25. This is not surprising given regional trends, and there is little vacant land in the City itself; much growth must come through redevelopment as the plan acknowledges. The plan does an excellent job of explaining the growth trends in the area, especially concerning BRAC, and the undeveloped 2,000 acre Konterra development.

The City must prepare for demands of heavy growth. To address this concern, it would behoove the City to consult with the counties regarding the Municipal Growth Element as required by the law. The ability to project how much growth to expect is critical to the strength of the plan and the ability of the City to deal with this growth.

MUNICIPAL GROWTH ELEMENT

The plan doesn't project the City's population, although it refers to a "maximum projected population" on P. 161. It provides little or no impact analysis on infrastructure or sensitive areas. There is no land capacity or holding capacity analysis.

In 2006, the General Assembly passed House Bill 1141 which required counties and municipalities to address new elements within their comprehensive plans and expand on the sensitive areas element. The law requires these new elements and all other mandatory elements to be included in comprehensive plans by October 1, 2009, or the jurisdiction cannot rezone land.

The plan includes a chapter for the Municipal Growth Element, and while some of the requirements for it appear elsewhere in the plan, they are not included in this chapter. It would be helpful if the plan contained a distinct Municipal Growth Element with all portions present in one place. The Element should begin with a discussion of population projections and their impacts on infrastructure and services, land use needs, and then future growth areas.. In order to assist in this effort, the City may want to review MDP's Models and Guidelines #25: *Writing the Municipal Growth Element to the Comprehensive Plan*.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Population projections are important as they form the basis and driving force behind all future planning. On page 25, the plan states that growth of approximately 10% is expected between 2007 and 2010, but it does not specify whether this growth would occur within Laurel proper, or Laurel and vicinity. This discussion should be coupled with how much land and public infrastructure is needed to serve the identified future population. There should be a clear link between the population projections (demand) and the supply of developable land (supply). The plan should establish a horizon year. The population projections and projected residential permit approvals are only referenced through 2010 (p.137). Comprehensive plans typically have horizon years of 20 to 30 years.

Additionally, the charts for Projected Residential Permit Approvals on pages 137 and 138 would prove more beneficial if they were included in the Municipal Growth Element chapter.

DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY OR BUILD OUT ANALYSIS

The draft plan does not include a development capacity analysis. Local governments are required to perform this analysis as part of their comprehensive plan updates via the Development Capacity Analysis Local Government MOU (signed by the Maryland Municipal League and Maryland Association of Counties in August, 2004) and the Development Capacity Analysis Executive Order (signed by Governor Ehrlich in August, 2004). The capacity analysis is the basis for determining whether existing developable land will accommodate future population growth or whether redevelopment or annexation is required.

The plan states that the City has limited vacant land for new development; however based on past trends there appears to be potential for infill and revitalization. By completing this analysis, the City will be able to determine if future annexation is needed. This analysis is also important because it helps to determine if there is an adequate balance between land supply and land demand.

ANNEXATION AREAS

The plan refers to annexation areas, which are given an extensive fiscal analysis in the Appendix, but it is not clear if the plan actually recommends the annexation of these parcels, and this analysis also lacks population figures and projections, as well as a discussion of current water resource needs and build-out demands for water and wastewater.

No *recommended* growth areas are described. Unless the plan shows actual growth areas beyond the City limits, Laurel will not be able to annex land after October 1, 2009 unless it amends the comprehensive plan first. Any annexation after that date must be consistent with the Municipal Growth Element of the comprehensive plan. There is a reference to Map No. 11 which apparently shows the growth areas studied. Please provide this map.

All of these and any other required key findings should be included in the Municipal Growth Element chapter of the plan.

INFRASTRUCTURE

HB 1141 also requires that the Municipal Growth Element examine the relationship between infrastructure supply and future population demand.. This includes: public school capacity, library services, police, fire, water and sewer facilities, stormwater management systems and recreation facilities. The draft plan discusses the line item fiscal impact for these items, but needs for additional police and other staff, as well as infrastructure needs should also be addressed.

HOUSING ELEMENT

The plan expresses the need to provide more affordable housing. HB 1160, enacted in 2006, established a Workforce Housing Grant Program. To be eligible for monies from this grant, the City must include a Work Force Housing Element in the Comprehensive Plan. A Workforce Housing Element should address:

- Preservation or renovation of existing housing stock;
- Redevelopment of existing residential areas;
- Streamlined regulatory process;
- Reduced regulatory fees for construction or renovation and leveraging of Federal financial assistance;
- Financial incentives for construction and renovation;
- Special zoning regulations including inclusionary zoning;
- Efforts to preserve workforce housing stock for subsequent program participants; and,
- Coordination with neighboring jurisdictions and private sector employers.

WATER RESOURCES ELEMENT

The plan is missing most of the required Water Resources Element (WRE) items that will need to be addressed by October 1, 2009. The city should refer to Models and Guidelines #26: *The Water Resources Element: Planning for Water Supply, Wastewater and Stormwater Management* for a comprehensive explanation of the requirements.

The water supply parameters require:

- specifics about the source(s) of raw water and each source(s) maximum reservoir;
- operational details about the supply and delivery of drinking water;
- the current water demand to the size of the population being served;
- the future water supply demand that the Annexation Areas A-D would require if served, or if they are already served;
- any water supply issues and system management that anticipated growth plans might cause;
- any water conservation plans or emergency supply plans that might be implemented.

The waste water parameters require:

- specifics about management and operation of the waste water collection system;
- information about inter-jurisdictional agreements if applicable,
- identification of the discharge locations and types of systems being used for treatment;
- the total maximum daily loads (TMDL's), if applicable;

- the Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategic point source caps for the discharge;
- the current quality of the treated effluent in terms of nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) loading and any other contaminant that may be of concern to the watershed;
- the future N and P loading that each new area of service would contribute,
- the current estimation of all non-point source N and P loading (septic, storm water, agricultural lands etc.) and the future loading that the identified growth areas would contribute; and
- while not required but necessary to manage growth and environmental stewardship, the Public Facilities and Community Services capital projects that are funded and those that may be needed to address the growth demands outlined in the Plan, including those that will serve to minimize pollution loading, both point and non-point sources.

MAPS

In general, many of the maps suffer from poor resolution and are hard to read. Please refer to the specific comments and edits section following for specific concerns regarding maps. Many of the maps show the City boundaries without reference to adjacent territory. As a point of reference, it might help to consistently include county boundaries, arterial streets, watercourses and other natural elements that define the geographic context of the City.

Map No.11 seems to be missing.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS AND EDITS

P.12. Map No 1. Add north arrow.

P.16. 3rd paragraph states that the “population has risen to nearly 19,000”. Please identify the source and date for this information.

P.16,17. A map would be helpful to illustrate patterns of development.

P.17. 6th paragraph. Change square ‘feet’ to read ‘foot’.

P.19. 1st paragraph. In discussing the growth of Columbia, change 2005 to 2007.

P.19. 2nd paragraph. In the discussion on Konterra, it is stated that the ultimate build-out over the next 20 years will have a profound effect on the City and the region. Describe what is mean by this, and whether it means in terms of an increase in City population, or perhaps a reduction of the growth rate in the City.

P.19. 3rd paragraph. The year ‘2001’ should read ‘2011’.

P.19. Table No. 1 chronicles recent the population growth of the Washington Suburban Region and the Baltimore Region, but does not list which jurisdictions make up those regions (which might not include those in Virginia). The table shows that the Baltimore Region is larger, but on page 16 it was asserted that the Washington Region was larger.

P.20. Table No.3. Montgomery County’s 2010 population should read 1,000,000.

P.22. A generalized soil map would be helpful, as would a map for water on p.23.

P.25. 1st paragraph. Word 'underwent' should be one word. Regarding the discussion of population growth, explain how or whether annexation had anything to do with these increases.

P.25. 2nd paragraph. A population trend map would be useful here.

P.25. Table No.5. Population figures for 2000 and 2007 seem to contradict the 19,000 figure stated on p.16.

P..27. 2nd paragraph states that the County's growth is projected to increase more rapidly. It would be useful to explain why.

P.28. 3rd paragraph. See note for page.19. Also, define the term 'background traffic'.

P.30. 1st paragraph. Line 6. 'Consist' should read 'consisted'. Also, consider adding a population chart in graphic form.

P. 30 and P.36 seem to conflict. P.36 states that average age of the population will continue to climb. P. 30 shows mixed ages of population growth, without establishing a trend. This should be clarified. Perhaps a chart showing average age of the population over time would be useful.

P.31. Table No. 8. Need to add \$ signs to Per Capita and Median Household columns.

P.31. Table No. 9. Add \$ signs.

P.31. Table No.10. sp Anne Arundel County.

P.32. Line 3, 4. add punctuation as follows: (1980: 2.4; 1990: 2.25; 2000, 2004: 2.22.)

Last line: sp 'increased'.

P.34. 1st paragraph. Last line: delete 'State of'.

Table No.14. Add \$ signs.

P.35. This section needs to be explained in greater depth.

P.36. 3rd paragraph. Line 4. 'increase' should read 'increased'. There should be a calculated table of projections well beyond 2007.

P.41. Expand the discussion of infill and intensification.

P. 41-second sentence from top. Word "offers" should be "offer".

P.41. 3rd paragraph: 1st bullet: Line 2: sp 'their'.

P.41. 2nd bullet: Line 2: sp 'entertainment'.

P.41 Line 3: Word 'or' should read 'for'.

P.42-good idea, recommends fiscal and facilities impact study be done for most new development.

P.44. Line 1: 'diversity' should read 'range'.

P.46. Urban growth boundary. Consider whether a discussion of changing the boundary before it is even implemented weakens its effectiveness..

Housing. The first goal seems to be contradictory to Objective #1.

P. 46-recommends that substantial portion of future housing stock should be single-family detached homes. Is such emphasis on single-family development desirable from a land consumption standpoint considering the lack of available land within the City?

P.47. Objective #2 is too general.

P.49. Objective #3. Define 'substantial development'.

P.53. 1st paragraph, Line 4. Add comma after '2005, a'.

P.54. Graph No.3. Break out housing by type.

P.57. Map No.5. Re-title to read, "Annexations since 2000". Map is hard to read.

P.66. Maps are needed for R0-2 and R0-3.

P.67. Maps are needed for R0-4, R0-5, and R0-6.

P.68. The heading should read 'Mixed Use Transportation Oriented Development'.

P.68. There is a passage in middle of the page about Mayor and Council approving additional amenities and modifying development standards by ordinance. What does this pertain to? Plat and site plan approvals are the province of the planning commission

P.69. Map insert not included.

P.69. This states that the Neotraditional Overlay Zone's maximum residential density will be only 8 DU/acre. Is that correct?

P.75. 7th paragraph. Line 3. Add 'to' after 'not'.

Last line: to read.....'designed for a portion of'.....

P.82. Map No.9. Map is hard to read. Needs a scale.

P.83. Map No.10. Needs a scale.

P.86. There is a reference an Insert Map No. 11 that apparently illustrates several growth areas being studied. This map was not included in the plan.

P. 86. There is a reference to annexing properties at or NEAR municipal boundaries. All annexations must be contiguous.

P.87. This is where the Municipal Growth Element should appear in detail. Refer to this letter and to Models and Guidelines #25.

P.93. The community facilities element beginning on page 93 contains excellent and detailed information concerning the available police, fire and emergency services. However, much of this information probably belongs in an appendix.

P.105. Table No. 25. Should this read 'Bulk' Trash?

P.111. Map No.16. This map does not delineate the municipal boundary in terms of the sewer service areas. Consider replacing it with a map that is consistent with the other maps.

P.111. States that potable water and wastewater services are adequate but makes no further comment on water resources

P.144. 4th paragraph. Master Plan rewrite began in 2006.

P.153. Paragraph 5. Line 3. Word 'disable' should read 'disabled'.

Paragraph 6. Line 3. Change to read 'transporting of anyone'.

P.157. 3rd paragraph. Line 6. Word 'transverse' should read 'traverse'.

P.161-refers to "the maximum projected population for the City" which is not provided.

P.180, 1- Regulatory Revisions. This would be better if it gave more specific guidance for ordinance changes. None are presented here.

Additional comments attached: